

**WASHINGTON** -- American troops deployed to Kosovo as part of a NATO peacekeeping operation should not serve under foreign commanders, say U.S. Rep. Spencer Bachus (R-AL) and a bipartisan group of House members.

Bachus and the others warned President Clinton in a letter initiated by the Alabama congressman that they are "steadfastly opposed" to the administration's plan to put U.S. troops in Kosovo under foreign command.

"I am opposed to sending U.S. troops to Kosovo. There is no vital American interest at stake and we've already stretched our troops thin around the world. We should completely avoid committing our troops to yet another open-ended deployment in the Balkans," Bachus said, referring to the 6,200 American troops who have been stationed in Bosnia since 1995.

"But, if our troops go they should at least be under American command."

The U.S. historically has opposed putting American troops under foreign command and, reflecting this reluctance, all commanders of NATO troops in Bosnia are American. However, the Clinton administration announced earlier this week that it is willing to put U.S. troops under foreign command in Kosovo. The administration is considering sending as many as 7,000 American troops to Kosovo as part of a planned NATO force.

"While we certainly believe there are times when the U.S. should act in concert with our allies, the American public expects and demands that Americans be in charge when the lives of our men and women in the military are at risk," the bipartisan group of 24 members say in the letter. "We all witnessed the dangers of placing our military forces under foreign command during operations in Somalia."